

BUGS ON TOUR

Story and Photo by
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WHEN the Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine-West, at

Fort Lewis, Wash., took its insect specimens on tour, kids at nearby Hillside Elementary School couldn't have been happier, school officials said.

"I never saw one of those, and I was a little scared at first," said third-grader Jessica Pine of a Madagascar cockroach that "tickled and pinched" as it moved around on her hand. "But now I'd like to hold it again."

Pupils in 17 classes — who experienced a break from their regular studies — got a chance to learn about insects that are rarely found in western Washington, such as various species of beetles, a pink-toed tarantula, grasshoppers, locusts, crane flies and a pseudo-scorpion.

CHPPM-West provides entomology services; environmental, industrial and engineering hygiene; and a variety of laboratory sciences for the Army Medical Department and Army

personnel stationed at installations in 22 western states.

"We teach soldiers in the preventive-medicine specialty how to take environmental samples in a combat theater in order to test for such insect-borne or rodent-borne diseases as plague, malaria and yellow fever," said CHPPM senior entomologist Jim Harrison.

"By collecting and testing various species of insects and rodents, CHPPM-West detects contaminants and potential health hazards on the battlefield, in the home, in schools and in workplaces," Harrison said.

"We found out long ago that kids are interested in science, and they're

extremely interested in bugs," said Harrison, one of 35 CHPPM-West staff members. "All kids know what bugs are. They know about ladybugs, spiders and ticks."

Harrison said he hopes that by taking the collection into local schools he can encourage children to "learn more about insects — and help the kids understand that insects can be beneficial." At the same time, he said, introducing children to insects helps pique their interest in science in general.

Besides sponsoring the visits to schools, CHPPM-West also invites groups to visit its laboratory to learn more about bugs. □



Kiara Armour takes a close look at a group of jungle cockroaches during an insect demonstration in her third-grade class at Hillside Elementary School.

Brendalyn Carpenter, a public affairs intern at Fort Lewis, wrote this article for the post's newspaper, the Northwest Guardian.